Research Journal Article Review

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**Introduction**

The title of the article being reviewed in this paper is **Developing inclusive practices through collaborative action research**. The authors are Vassilios S. Argyropoulos and Magda A. Nikolaraizi. The topic of the research is explained rather well by the title, developing inclusive practices through collaborative action research. The specific research questions used to guide the study were: “(1) What was the impact of the action research project on the general teachers’professional development? (2) What was the impact of the action research project on student teachers’ professional development? (3) What was the impact of the action research project on the academic access of the two pupils with special educational needs?” (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) The authors state important reasons for conducting this action research project with the main one being that the complex issues which arise with the requirement of inclusion settings must be addressed by, “changing classic techniques and strategies and reflecting on collaborative research projects (action research projects) conducted by teachers, pupils and researchers which seek to advance an agenda for inclusion bringing or conveying changes to institutional cultures and practices.” ((Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) In addition, the authors refer to a host of literature which point out different educational challenges set up by inclusive education. For example, inclusive education is a whole new ideal. The underpinnings of this ideal are things like equity, emancipation and empowerment and these ideas can lead to conflict as well as dilemmas and issues among educators who have different view points on the matter. (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) The literature review concluded that the challenges inclusion presents can possibly be addressed through a collaborative teaching model which was then researched for one year at a school in Greece. (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009)

**The Project**

The authors chose to use an action research project to study the benefits of collaboration and co-teaching in an inclusive classroom. They chose this method because it is a methodology that employs two conditions both of which were present in the projects they had planned. (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) The two conditions are that, “it seeks the improvement of teachers’ practice in order to improve their students’ understanding, using any appropriate tool, and the other is that it seeks an understanding of the educational setting and context in general.” (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) There are four aspects to action research: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) The projects conducted consisted of these four aspects and accomplished the task of an action research project which is change. (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) The participants of the study were: “a nine-year-old pre-lingually deaf girl (Anna) who attended the second grade of a general primary school with 17 hearing children, and a 12-year-old girl (Maria) with blindness who attended the sixth grade of another general primary school with 18 sighted classmates. The action research network group consisted of the school counsellor, who took the initiative for these projects, two academic researchers and two student teachers from the Department of Special Education, University of Thessaly and two general teachers from the two different general schools within which Anna and Maria were educated.” (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) Two action research projects were done. One focused on the blind student and the other on the deaf student. Both projects had three cycles. Each cycle consisted of the four components of action research, which are planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In the first cycle of both projects, the general teacher and the student teacher were parallel teaching, but the model was not collaborative. As they moved through the cycles in both projects, different degrees of collaboration were introduced, used and expanded upon depending on the needs of the student.

**Results**

Regarding the first two research questions posed, the “The two general teachers in our study felt that the collaborative action research network helped them to interrogate their practice and teaching models in order to seek a deeper understanding of what these processes involved.” (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) Also, “They believed that they acquired important practical experience and knowledge and felt more equipped to respond to a deaf or to a blind child’s needs.” (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) In regards to the third research question, “the projects had a positive impact on Maria’s and Anna’s academic access to the general classroom.” (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009)

**Discussion, Implications, Recommendations**

Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi (2009) state:

“Hence, it is not an exaggeration that through this action research network we highlighted the necessity of building up a constructivist curriculum which can capture

knowledge, culture, interactions, institutional arrangements and personal histories of

all the people who are involved in an ‘educational journey’. All this is strongly connected with issues of inclusive educational policy which seems, at least in the Greek educational context, far away or mutually excluded from the broader educational context. Also this study raised key issues regarding some ideas which are sometimes disregarded in debates on inclusion.”

The authors went on to state that the study is one that needs further research. They also stated that the findings were specific to the context in which the study was done and that further research is needed in this area before this could be considered ‘ideal practices.’ (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009)

**My Thoughts**

I would have to agree with the following quote from the article regarding this study: “Inclusive education enriched with the cyclical nature of collaborative planning and reflecting can improve the current educational system, can help pupils become more accepting and can encourage collaboration.” (Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) I say this because I have participated in many collaborative planning and co-teaching units and models at my school due to the fact that it is an A+ School. I have seen firsthand how this model of teaching influences and benefits specially identified students who are included in the general education classroom. Many of the things noted above are very easily verified by observation of some of these collaborative units being taught at my school. For example, a student I taught a couple of years ago was born with many challenges. She has severe childhood apraxia of speech as well as a condition which caused her muscles not to develop properly. She had also been diagnosed with severe ADHD and learning disabilities. My class participated that year in a collaborative unit on the Life Cycle of a Butterfly. I co-taught the unit with several different arts’ specialists in many different settings. This young lady gained access to her peers as well as the curriculum in a way that she had never had access before. As a result of my experience, and the benefits I saw to both of the students (and teachers) who participated in this study, I think the research was well worth the effort. I also agree with the authors that more research should be done in this area to prove the effectiveness of it on inclusion students. This research was limited because it was done on such a small scale. However, I would be willing to guess that there are other similar studies that have been conducted; and, if not they need to be conducted and on a much larger scale. The implications for schools where inclusion is required and already in place could be the difference between specially identified students succeeding or failing.

**Connections**

“Co-teachers provide instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students that includes students with disabilities and other special needs as well as other learners who are not so identified.” (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008) This quote (which I actually read in our Friend and Cook book on page 111) links really well to this action research. When there are two teachers serving the diverse needs of most current student populations, the students are sure to benefit, unless the co-teachers do not share a mutual purpose and vision and have not well prepared by co-planning. The video we watched by Dr. Daigle, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2ZRFJDIxWE&playnext_from=TL&videos=va1VAoiwWyw>) spoke clearly that the teachers who had co-planned, had the incentives, had the skills and knowledge, yet lacked the common vision were still going to fail in their attempt to co-teach. This action research project had teachers who clearly had a mutual vision/purpose as they had volunteered to participate in the study and had great attitudes throughout the study with a willingness to do whatever was asked of them. This study also speaks to the issue of a co-teaching situation being considered a teacher/assistant model. In Cycle 2 of both projects conducted, the teacher and student teacher were introduced to the idea of more of a co-teaching situation where they were both addressing all students in the room, as opposed to the teacher addressing the whole class and the student teacher addressing the student of need. ((Argyropoulos and Nikolaraizi 2009) This directly relates to information shared by Friend and Cook (2010), “…research on the practices of co-teaching and outcomes for students that result from co-teaching are essential.” Friend and Cook (2010) go on to state that teachers have shared in many conversations that being explicitly taught the roles and responsibilities of a co-teaching model would have helped them avoid the teacher/assistant mindset. 3

The study I reviewed has helped me to see an even bigger purpose for co-teaching and collaboration. I am more convinced than ever that teaching this way is the most effective method for making the curriculum accessible to students with special needs, as well as making teachers more effective at their practice.

References

Argyropoulos, V. S., & Nikolaraizi, M. A. (2009). Developing inclusive practices through

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*facilitating student learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.